

Mr. Chairman...Members of the Agriculture Committee:

My name is Linda Metzger. I'm a self-employed registered nurse. I am a proponent of House Bill 726 in its entirety, but I'd like to speak to you today about the part with which I have personal experience – Section 2.

My husband and I moved to our home nine miles west of Great Falls in 1984. For 14 years we were able to enjoy the quiet beauty of our state; but that was no longer possible after an animal hoarder moved into our neighborhood in 1998.

For the last eight years, dozens of neighbors, sheriff's deputies, and county officials have had to do battle with this person to try to get her to stop her serial hoarding of hundreds of dogs, cats, and other animals. It has cost Cascade County tens of thousands of dollars, and the primary reason it hasn't cost much, much more is the fact that hundreds of volunteers, fresh off of the Camp Collie experience that began in Shelby, stepped up to care for these abused animals.

A landmark lawsuit against a similar hoarder in Oregon in 1995 resulted in the passing of the "Kittles Law," which at the time was the toughest animal cruelty law in the country. It cost \$150,000. When it was over, the District Attorney who prosecuted it is reported to have described the procedure as "the world's longest root canal without benefit of anesthesia." I suspect the Cascade County Attorney's Office, along with the neighbors, would have no quibble with that metaphor.

The *State of Montana v. Pamela Polejewski* plea agreement last year prohibits the defendant from having any dogs or cats for five years. She has not complied, resulting in part of her suspended jail sentence being revoked...but there's not enough room in our jails for this type of offender. The U.S. Bureau of Justice says the recidivism rate for robbers, burglars, larcenists, and motor vehicle thieves is between 70 and 79%. The Hoarding of Animals Research Consortium says the recidivism rate for hoarders is nearly 100% if there's no ongoing treatment.

One legislator told me that we have civil remedies here in Montana, and indeed we do. My neighbors and I brought a public nuisance lawsuit against the hoarder. She proceeded to file Chapter 7 bankruptcy, resulting in the bankruptcy court dismissing our suit.

One long-suffering neighbor of mine suggested that when the hoarding resumes and the dogs are again running at large, we employ a "Way of the Old West" – the "Triple-S" method of nuisance dog control: Shoot, Shovel, and Shut up. Ladies and gentlemen, this is a prescription for a modern range war.

House Bill 726, Section 2, provides prosecutors and judges with a tool for that intractable and peculiar type of animal cruelty known as hoarding -- a tool that has actually worked to decrease recidivism: **A psychiatric or psychological evaluation, followed by treatment if appropriate, at the defendant's expense.** This is painless legislation for your Committee to approve...if you pass it, you'll reduce the chance that a hoarder will resume inflicting pain on animals, neighbors, and taxpayers. Let us not have to reinvent the wheel every time a hoarder is exposed – and in the last four years, *seven* hoarders, from all around the state of Montana, have gotten *national* exposure.

A hoarder forces citizens to pay one way or the other...let's at least make him or her pay along with us, so that we will end up paying less, both in time and in treasure. Please vote FOR House Bill 726.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you.

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“That was one of the most appalling things I’ve ever seen,”



Two puppies huddle in the corner of a Cascade County Humane Society vehicle.



Tribune photos by Mark Sterkel

Frank Hayes, left, and Rick Fisher, animal control officers with the Cascade County Humane Society, confiscate a tank of gold fish from a Great Falls residence in which officers found 17 dogs, six cats and other animals living in allegedly filthy conditions.

Woman may face 27 counts of animal cruelty

By SANJAY TALWANI
Tribune Staff Writer

In what authorities are calling a “puppy mill situation,” a Great Falls woman may be cited with as many as 27 counts of animal cruelty for the 17 dogs, six cats, one ferret, two birds and 12 goldfish living in allegedly filthy conditions in her lower southside home.

Police and animal control officers said Thursday they expected to cite Pamela Polejewski, 709 8th Ave. S., as soon as they found her.

“That was one of the

most appalling things I’ve ever seen,” said Dr. Micki Lague of Central West Animal Clinic, who has worked with dogs for about 20 years. “That’s going to bother me for months.”

Tracey Hurd, senior animal control officer with the Cascade County Humane Society said neighbors had long complained about conditions and barking dogs in the home.

Police received a noise complaint about 3 a.m. Thursday regarding a loud stereo, which officers believe was turned on to cover the barking.

Police and animal control officers got a warrant and searched the home about 6 a.m.. Wearing masks against the stench of animal wastes, they removed the pets and took them to the animal shelter for cleanup and evaluation.

The animals included four cats outside with no food, water or shelter, Hurd said. Neighbors told officers they had not seen Polejewski for at least a few days.

Even the goldfish tank removed by officers appeared green and slimy. Hurd said she believed Polejewski breeds the

border collies, heelers, Karelian bear dogs and mixed breeds and sells them for profit.

The stink was noticeable from the street. A few neighbors driving and walking by thanked the officers for the good riddance.

City ordinance prohibits more than two dogs in a household and does not set a limit on cats, if they are properly inoculated. But any animal subjected to cruelty or neglect is protected by state law.

Each count is punishable by up to six months in the jail.

County looking at health, care of 200 Vaughn animals

By KIM SKORNOGOSKI
Tribune Staff Writers

Responding to a report of cruel conditions, sheriff's deputies and veterinarians Friday examined 130 dogs and more than 70 other animals at a Vaughn-area home.

No charges had been filed against the animals' owner, Pamela Polejewski, 48, Friday night. Cascade County Sheriff David Castle said looking at each of the animals and determining if they are malnourished or diseased could take all weekend.

In 2003, prosecutors dropped 29 misdemeanor animal cruelty charges against Polejewski after she agreed to find homes for her dogs.

Deputies scrambled to gather kennels and corrals to separate and contain the animals Friday afternoon after county attorneys got a warrant to search the home, about 12 miles west of Great Falls at 77 Wexford Lane.

Simply counting the animals was a task.

Investigators said Polejewski had 130 dogs and pup-

pies, 17 horses, one rabbit, 17 cats, 16 chickens, six pigs, six parakeets, two guinea pigs, two goats, two ducks and two turkeys.

Officers also found one dead kitten on the property.

The animals are being kept in makeshift kennels and in the two mobile homes on the property.

Castle said officers were working with the Equine Protection League and Cascade County and Northern Rockies regional humane societies to try to find a place to keep any animals that might be seized. For the time being, officers were searching for portable kennels to keep the dogs in during the investigation.

Until all the animals are examined, a deputy will be stationed at the home.

Polejewski couldn't be reached Friday. In court documents filed in connection with a recent complaint, she defends her home as a refuge for dogs that otherwise would be euthanized or

See ANIMALS, 5A

County will try again to take dogs

By KIM SKORNOGOSKI
Tribune Staff Writer

As soon as Sunday, the county wants to take 130 dogs from the owners of an animal refuge west of Great Falls after the couple yelled at and turned away rescue organizations who tried to take the dogs for adoption.

With District Judge Julie Macek's approval, deputies and animal rescuers will seize — by force if needed — as many of Pamela Polejewski's dogs as they can manage.

The remaining dogs would be taken as resources allow.

Polejewski and her husband, Michael Hanson, face misdemeanor animal cruelty charges. Deputies found more than 200 animals on the property at 77 Wexford Lane in August.

With the criminal charges pending, lawyers have been wrangling to arrange for the animals to be adopted.

The legal hoop-jumping frustrates neighbors who have been asking for help controlling the noise since Polejewski moved there in 1998.

"We neighbors have known for years that she doesn't keep agreements," said Linda Metzger, one of 17 neighbors suing Polejewski and Hanson. "There's a learning curve here. The county has to realize she's

See DOGS, 8A

County digs deep to care for confiscated animals

By KIM SKORNOGOSKI
Tribune Staff Writer

Cascade County commissioners are carving \$250,000 out of this year's budget to care for and find homes for 200 dogs, horses, cats and other animals owned by a Great Falls area couple charged with animal cruelty.

Pamela Polejewski and her husband, Michael Hanson, agreed to set aside at least \$300 a month to repay the county, but commissioners estimate that money won't come close to covering the costs.

Since responding to a call about horses without water on Aug. 10, the sheriff's office has spent \$14,000 to pay a deputy overtime to man the couple's property west of Great Falls at 77 Wexford Lane.

The deputy left last week

You can help

While the animals are not ready to be adopted, people can help by donating money, dog or cat food. Call the sheriff's office animal control office at 454-6820.

when he was no longer needed to preserve evidence.

Commissioner Joe Briggs said immunizing the 130 dogs and puppies on the property would cost \$40,000 — something that would have to be done before they could be adopted.

Bills for veterinarians to examine the animals and medicines to make the ani-

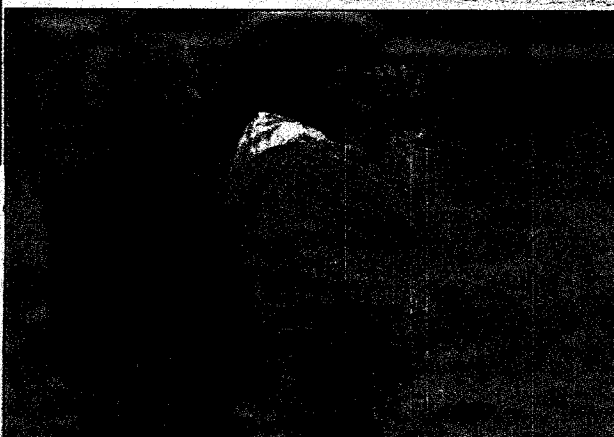
See ANIMALS, 5A

How to help

Anyone wanting to volunteer to help find homes for the animals is asked to call the Cascade County Sheriff's Office at 454-6820.



Polejewski



TRIBUNE PHOTO BY ROBIN LOZNAK

Cascade County Deputy Steve Brekke videotapes the scene as Deputy Ben Crawford looks on while serving a search warrant on a property on Wexford Lane west of Great Falls Friday.